

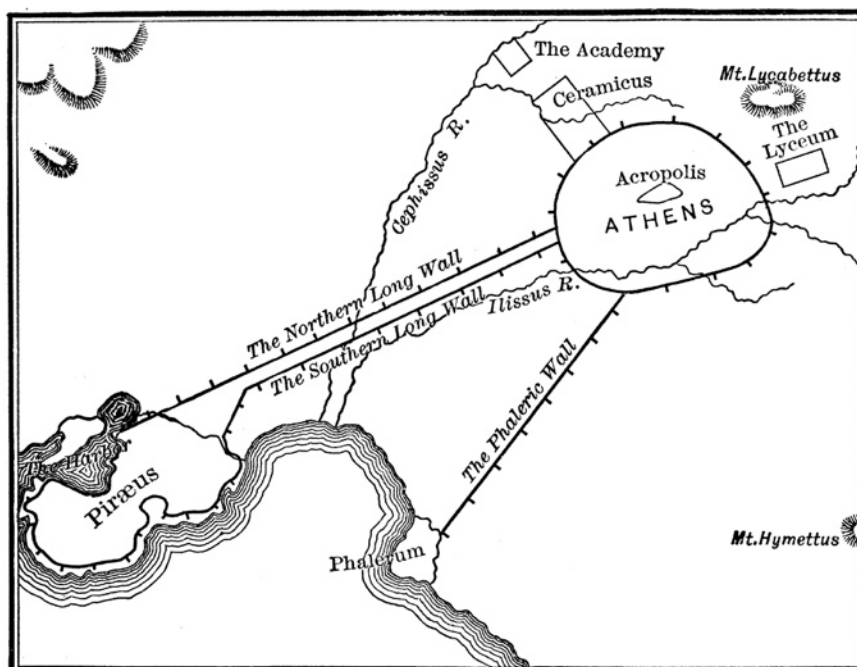
PELOPONNESIAN WARS

The Peloponnesian Wars, fought between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies, came in two stages, the first from 460 to 446 BCE and the second and more significant war from 431 to 404 BCE. With battles occurring at home and abroad, the long and complex conflict was damaging to both sides but Sparta, with financial help from Persia, finally won the conflict by destroying the Athenian fleet near the Black Sea.

CAUSES OF THE WARS

In the 5th century BCE Sparta and Athens were the two major powers in Greece. Following the Persian Wars, the Greek city-states began to align themselves in protective alliances to guard against the threat of another Persian attack. Many city-states (but not Sparta) sided with Athens, which led the Delian League sometime around 478 BCE. The League at its greatest size was composed of almost 200 members who paid tribute to Athens, the strongest naval power in Greece. The city-states allied with Athens paid tribute in the form of either ships or money in return for Athenian protection. The treasury of the League was placed on the sacred island of Delos, but later was moved to Athens. Over the next several decades, the Delian League freed Ionia from Persian rule and cleared the Aegean Sea of pirates. Overseas trade expanded, and Greece grew richer.

Many city-states not part of the Delian League, however, thought Athens was beginning to resemble an empire. The Athenian leader, Pericles, for example, used part of the Delian League's treasury to build the Parthenon in Athens. He insisted that other city-states adopt Athens' money system. In short, Pericles' policies transformed the Delian League from an anti-Persian defense league into an Athenian empire. Sparta seems to have been particularly alarmed at the growing power of Athens, able to build an ever-bigger fleet of ships. Sparta was also suspicious of the Athenians' project to build fortifications called the Long Walls which connected the harbor of Piraeus with Athens.



On its side, Sparta and allied city-states (including Corinth) formed their own protective alliance. City-states did not pay tribute to Sparta, but provided troops under Spartan command in exchange for protection.

PELOPONNESIAN WARS

One of the sparks for war between Athens and Sparta involved Athens' desire for timber and minerals from a region beyond the city-state of Potidaea, whose leaders asked for and received Sparta's promise of protection. Athens laid siege to the city in 432 BCE but Sparta did not declare war, perhaps concerned about conflict. In the spring of 431 BCE, however, the city-state of Thebes, an ally of Sparta, attacked Plataea, an ally of Athens. The war was on. Athens then attacked several cities and won.



Hostilities then broke out between other allies of Athens and Sparta, and the Peloponnesian army led by a Spartan king invaded and ravaged Attica, the region around Athens. Athens was weakened when it was hit by a devastating plague in 430 BCE. Crowded behind the defensive walls, many citizens of Athens were killed, including its great leader Pericles.

With Sparta predominantly a land-based army and Athens a great maritime power, it is not perhaps surprising that the war dragged on with indecisive raids and victories. The principal Spartan strategy was to annually attack Athenian lands, creating as much destruction as possible by burning farms and chopping down olive trees and vineyards. However, the actual effect of this on the Athenian economy is unclear, especially when considering that the city could always be resupplied by sea via the city's port of Piraeus protected by the Long Walls. It may have been a Spartan strategy to entice the Athenians out from behind their fortifications into open battle, a temptation that the leaders of Athens resisted.



Sparta's Strategy:
• Offensive on land

Athens' Strategy:
• Defensive on land
• Offensive on sea
• Continue foreign trade

Athens could and did retaliate by raiding the area around Sparta and Corinth from the sea.

After Pericles died, some Athenians wanted to make peace with Sparta and its allies, while other Athenians wanted to keep fighting. Eventually, several allies of Athens switched sides and joined the Spartan-led alliance. The war was finally won by Sparta, perhaps ironically in a naval battle. Sparta was able to build a massive fleet of 200 triremes using Persian money and timber. With this formidable weapon, the Spartan general Lysander was able to inflict a final and total defeat on the Athenians near the Hellespont in 405 BCE when 170 Athenian ships were captured on the beach and at least 3,000 Athenian captives were executed. Unable to man another fleet, with the Delian League disbanded and Athens itself under siege, the Athenians had no option but to surrender. Conditions of surrender were the dismantling of the Long Walls, a prohibition on rebuilding a fleet bigger than 12 ships, and the payment of tribute to Sparta, which was now, finally, recognized by all as the dominant power in Greece.

AFTERMATH

Sparta's position as the number one city-state in Greece, though, was to be short-lived. Weakened by years of war, King Phillip II of Macedonia (Alexander the Great's father), was able to invade and crush Greek city-states with relative ease.

Adapted from article written by Mark Cartwright, Ancient World Encyclopedia. http://www.ancient.eu/Peloponnesian_War/